



Wargamers Monthly



May 1996

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 5

THE FORUM OF COMPUTER WARGAMING

3 Yards and a Cloud of Dust

A Review of Arsenal's *TACOPS*

by Bill Hesson

The playtesters list for Arsenal Publishing's *TacOps* for Windows looks like a selection from the *Wargamers Monthly* subscription list, so I am aware that I may be stepping on toes if I fail to proclaim *TacOps* the game of the year. *TacOps* is an excellent game, but put on your steel-toed shoes.

TacOps is a tactical level game using weapons available between 1994-2000. It is a vague descendent of *Mech Brigade*, but has added many features that improve greatly on its ancestor. The maneuver units can be as large as a tank company, but the player has complete discretion to split these units up into single tanks or infantry teams. The golden mean is somewhere in the neighborhood of 2-3 tanks per unit. Larger units will be decimated by enemy artillery or air strikes, and smaller units will drive the player crazy issuing orders.

The full complement of weapons is available. In the scenario "Team Meyers", for example, the U.S. forces consist of 14 M1A2's, 13 Bradley's, 3 M901's, 4 M106's, 2 HMMWV's, 2 infantry scout teams, 11 infantry teams, 9 Javelins and 2 Stingers. Each infantry team is armed with M16's, M203 grenade launchers, and AT4 LAAW's. This defending force is supported by three batteries of 155 mm Howitzers and three F-16's. The opposing force (the politically correct "OPFOR") consists of a Motorized Rifle Battalion with tank reinforcement, modeled at a similar level of detail. And this is one of the smaller scenarios!

The game is played on a map that is missing one of the staples of tactical gaming. Gone are the traditional hexes. Instead, each pixel represents approximately 10 meters. Movement orders are given by clicking on a unit, then clicking on the destination. Up to 20 orders can be stored for an individual unit, so complicated paths may be assigned to take advantage of cover en route. Units may also be given orders to defilade at the end of movement. Defilade is described in the documentation as finding the best cover available in the area, and should not be mistaken for assuming a hull down or entrenched position. Although all units have a single

movement speed, which is described as somewhere between road speed and crawling on your belly, it is possible to slow up the advance by inserting one or more 15 second delays in the movement orders.

The turn routine consists of each side giving orders to any or all units, after which the execution phase is entered. This phase, reminiscent of *Mech Brigade*, consists of four 15 second pulses, during which units move and fire. This minute may fly by in a second, if no units are engaged and there is no artillery firing. When the action starts, however, a single minute can last a long time. Every unit gets a chance to fire each pulse. Even if a tank is destroyed by the first shot, it will have an opportunity to return fire before being replaced by a burning tank icon. This attempt to accurately model simultaneous action is further enhanced by a neat twist. Many antitank missiles, particularly OPFOR missiles, take awhile to reach their targets. When the flight time stretches over more than one pulse, destruction of the firing unit will eliminate the missile.

The way units react during the course of the execution phase is also subject to player control, through a set of SOPs. Individual units can be instructed to stop, pop smoke, or reverse for a specified distance after either firing or being fired upon. They can also be instructed to unload any units being carried. Through the careful use of the SOPs, it is possible to avoid situations in which your tank platoon stumbles onto a concealed OPFOR infantry team in the first pulse and continues past it, offering a rear shot to the enemy's antitank weapon in later pulses.

Units fire at spotted enemy targets automatically. There are a number of ways to shape the fire. You can set the minimum engagement distance for each unit. You can give units priority targets, specifying either a particular unit, a type of unit, or a particular area. These priorities may be soft, in which case the unit will look for another target if none of the specified priority is available, or hard, in which case the unit will not fire at all if no priority is available. The priorities may be mixed and matched. For instance, you can specify that a unit first look for a BMP in that suspicious clump of trees. If none are seen, it can be directed to look elsewhere for a BMP, but not to fire at anything else. Combined with the SOPs, the targeting priorities give the player powerful control over his forces during the execution phase, while still leaving a realistic chance that they will do something stupid.

Units also tend to use the right ammo on the right target, overcoming a problem that has plagued several other games. For instance, in one scenario a squad of Apache helicopters spotted a group consisting of several T-80's and infantry squads. The helicopters fired Hellfires at the tanks, followed by rocket clusters at the infantry. Units also avoid wasting fire on units they cannot possibly damage.

The scenarios with helicopters are particularly challenging. The Apache is the most dangerous weapon available against OPFOR tanks, but will not last long if there are SAM's in the

area. The helicopter can fly nap of the earth or mid-altitude. At the higher level, it can see great distances, wiping out entire enemy battalions at long range. If one of the targets is a BMP carrying SAM's and one of the SAM's survives, however, the Apache can disappear quickly. Helicopter SOPs include the possibility of taking evasive action if fired upon, which generally means dropping to a lower altitude and flying away quickly. They can also be stationed just behind a rise, hovering at the nap of the earth, with movement orders instructing them to hold position for two pulses, then pop up for two pulses to fire before dropping back down.

The greatest damage is generally done by the artillery. A certain amount of realism is sacrificed for the sake of playability, but the balance is a good one. There is no routine for selecting the unit that requests arty. You just select it and it will arrive, usually in about a minute. The first salvo is likely to be off target, but if any friendly unit can spot the target, subsequent rounds will have improved accuracy, up through five levels. If the fire isn't needed desperately, adjusting fire can be called, which will cause no damage but will increase subsequent accuracy without loss of ammunition. A single well-aimed volley of OPFOR artillery will break you of any habit of grouping your forces too closely together. OPFOR's ICM rounds are deadly on armored targets, and could wipe out a tank company that was not dispersed. If OPFOR has an MRL battalion, one volley can ruin your whole day.

Artillery fire may be shifted within a defined radius. Each shift will cost one level of accuracy, but will not delay the next round. On occasion, you will start a turn with an incoming round due in less than five seconds, and will be able to shift it several hundred meters to bring it down right on top of the enemy target. More often, you will have to match the anticipated delay to the likely movement of the target, leading it as best you can.

Air support is likewise a nice balance of playability and realism. Airstrikes are generally 4-15 minutes out, so they must be called for in advance of the immediate need. Like artillery, it may be shifted within a defined radius each turn. A strike that is 15 minutes out can be targeted, just to get it on its way, and then shifted multiple times en route, until a worthwhile target is identified. Unlike artillery, airstrikes do not lose accuracy when shifted. They will look for any target within 500 meters. If there are enemy helicopters in the vicinity, they will be the priority target. Unfortunately, although the U.S. forces are frequently well-supported by air, it is rarely of much use, due to the high concentration of OPFOR SAM's and antiaircraft fire, which can cause a strike to abort or miss badly.


The interface is excellent, offering great control with minimum hassle. As a Windows-based game, it comes with typical dropdown menus and corresponding hotkeys. Ctrl-L brings up a target cursor that permits you to determine line-of-sight and distance from any point to another, which is particularly helpful when plotting movement or selecting firing sites. Ctrl-I brings up detailed information on any selected unit, including, for friendly units, remaining rounds for each weapon, effective range, armor penetration and a nice photo.

So why isn't this the game of the year? It may be before the year is over. The primary weakness at this point is shelf life. Although *TacOps* comes with what seems to be a wealth of scenarios, many are merely minor variations of each other, and most are played on the same map. There is reason to hope for additional scenario disks in the future, but they are not available at this point. When playing against the computer, only U.S. and Canadian forces are available to the human player. OPFOR is always computer controlled. Two player capability is built-in, by hotseat, network, serial or PBEM. The AI is pretty good, with multiple variants available randomly for most of the primary scenarios, although OPFOR is much better on defense than in the attack.

My own personal objection arises from the complete absence of C3 or morale. As to the latter, the game designer

has specifically addressed the issue in the documentation, concluding that any solution would have dismayed as many players as it would have pleased. He may be right about that. The game does provide for suppression, which gives some credence to the immediate effects of being shot at, even if it does not model the effect of having the rest of your unit shot up. The lack of any command and control, however, is a serious flaw that will not be remedied easily. Units may be split up and sent all over the map, with each individual tank or fire team responding perfectly to command from above. With no leadership element, there is no incentive to pay any regard to formations above the level of a single track. I still believe that armies have officers for a reason, but you will find no hint of it in *TacOps*.

Nevertheless, *TacOps* is a must purchase. Assuming that additional scenarios are released at a reasonable price, it will have a long life on most hard drives. It is a great shoot 'em up. □



TACOPS

DESIGNER: Major I.L. Holdridge, USMC (Retired)
SYSTEM: IBM 386/33 DX+ w/ Windows 3.1+. 4 MB memory; 3.5" HD drive; Hard Drive w/ 8MB free; VGA; Mouse; Sound Card.
PUBLISHER: Arsenal Publishing, 44901 Falcon Place, Suite 108, Sterling, VA 20166-9531. (800) 247-1877.
RETAIL PRICE: \$44.95
WM RATING: ★★★★★

Recommended STEEL PANTHERS Reference Material List

- Small Unit Actions During the German Campaign In Russia Dept. of the Army Pamphlet #20-269, July 1953, 289-pages. Compilation of various infantry and armor battles that occurred during the Russian Campaign. Describes many battles with accompanying maps to aid in designing your own scenarios. This book may have been used by SP scenario designers.

- Shots Fired in Anger by Lt. Col. John George, NRA 1981, 535-pages. First person account of the battle of Guadalcanal by an army officer who was also knowledgeable about firearms. His account goes into great detail on the weapons and tactics of both sides.

- German Tanks & Fighting Vehicles of WWII by Chris Ellis & Peter Chamberlain Chartwell Books, 1976, 127-pages. Profusely illustrated book on all WWII German armor and artillery. Text and charts also do an excellent job of informing reader.

- U.S. Tanks of WWII by George Forty Blandford Press, 1983, 160-pages. Plenty of B&W photos and interesting, informative text on all U.S. tanks & tank destroyers used in WWII.

- Tanks vs. Tank by Kenneth Macksey Salem House, 1988, 190-pages. Excellent, highly readable history of tanks as they pertain to the wars they fought in. Especially valuable for the gun/armor tables.

- Steelwpn.txt or Steelwpn.doc (Word format) This "must have" text file is available from any of the information services and some WEB sites. It describes in detail the effectiveness of all SP weapons.

- Battlefield series on PBS. This is a series of indepth, 2-hour documentaries, one on each six major campaigns in WWII, to include the Battle for France 1940, Overlord, Stalingrad, and the Battle for Berlin. The series details the weapons, leaders, and tactics involved. A must see.

- Kevin Rohrer

Little Bundle of Joy

by Gerald McLain

Return with me to those glorious days of yesteryear... say, 1984 or so. Back then, the Commodore 64 and Apple II's were kings and real men programmed in Assembler. One fine day, I was wandering through a software store looking at the titles, when - lo and behold! - my eyes fell upon a peculiar looking package, shaped like a folder. It showed a squadron of Japanese Zeros making a suicide run at an aircraft carrier while a machine gun crew valiantly fought them off. The title on the package was *Carriers at War 1941-1945: Fleet Carrier Operations in the South Pacific*. The game's authors (Roger Keating and Ian Trout) were listed at the bottom. On the other side, a description of the game said that it simulated five WWII carrier battles plus Pearl Harbor. The part that really caught my eye, though, was the bottom part of the text. It described a "Design Kit" included in the game. The box made the claim that, not only could one create variations on the included scenarios, but complete original scenarios could also be developed. (Remember, folks, this is long before any marketing jerk coined the term "wargame construction set.") Adding to the overall mood, the name of the company for whom those Keating and Trout fellas presumably worked was listed at the very bottom - Strategic Studies Group Pty. Ltd. With a company name like that, they must know what they are doing, right?

I was enthralled. I bought the Commodore version of the game, took it home and loaded up the single floppy disk. Guess what? The game exceeded my wildest expectations. Play maps covered some 3.2 million square miles - not bad for a game that ran in 38K of free RAM. Weather, the fog of war, playing hide and seek with task forces throughout the Pacific, it was all there. The game played in groups of five minutes and added a new command to my wargaming vocabulary, Run 5. The graphics were nothing to get excited about, but after all this was a Commodore 64. Still, the finest element of the design was the construction kit. It did everything the package claimed. While a monumental amount of work was required, custom scenarios could be developed. The games could simulate other carrier battles, surface engagements or even fantasy battles.

Matter of fact, the second issue of *RUN 5*, the SSG house magazine (wonder where they got that title?) offered a scenario variation on Pearl Harbor called "The Final Countdown." It was based on the movie where Kirk Douglas' Nimitz is transported back in time to oppose the Japanese attack. Now this was fun! And I was not the only person who felt that way. I remember reading a review of *Carriers at War* that ended with the writer asking, "Wonder what they could do if they had a whole 64K?"

Let's move the clock forward to 1992. SSG's Keating and Trout decided to upgrade their system. By now, they had that 64K and a lot more. The wargaming community greeted their updated effort with more laurels. They had done something that is rare in the gaming industry - kept the best parts of the game, while adding graphics and ease of play in just the right places. The IBM compatible version of *Carriers at War* was

given high ratings for its mouse-driven interface and eye candy, and no sacrificing of the sophisticated game algorithms underneath. The biggest disappointment was the lack of a construction set option. It was promised as an add-on, but took nearly a year to materialize.

When the construction set did appear, it offered all the flexibility gamers demanded, and more - a lot more. Matter of fact, the darn thing was so complicated and time-consuming that players had difficulty developing the motivation to tinker with it. Undaunted, SSG offered *Carriers at War 2*, which was a debugged version of the original game with a few new scenarios and streamlined game play. Though it earned high marks on the WM ratings list, it hardly qualified as a new product worth top dollar.

Meanwhile, the faithful SSG groupies continued to subscribe to *RUN 5*. After the construction kit was released, several scenarios were published to be typed in by the frugal readers or purchased on issue disks by the extravagant. The bottom line was money. A wargamer had better REALLY like *Carriers at War* and its spawn to be able to justify a minimum of more than \$100 for the three products - plus a subscription to *RUN 5*.

As the days dragged on and CD-ROMs proliferated, SSG took a bold step in shovelware last year by releasing their *Warlords 2* products as a bundle. *Warlords 2* had originally been marketed much like *Carriers at War*, with a separate construction set. The bundle included the game, a set of play enhancements, the construction set and a score of new scenarios. I reviewed it in January 1996 and gave it good marks for playability and value. Would SSG do the same for *Carriers at War*?

VALUE ADDED

Obviously, the answer is yes, or you would not be reading this review. *The Complete Carriers at War (CCAW)* was released in the first quarter of '96. It is packaged similarly to *Warlords 2 Deluxe*. The whole thing comes on a single CD-ROM. It includes a hybrid version of *Carriers at War* and *Carriers at War 2* as a single game, along with the *Carriers at War Construction Kit*. A collection of new scenarios from the North Atlantic and Mediterranean Theaters and the scenarios published in *RUN 5* have been included, for a grand total of 33 different choices, each with several variants. Many scenarios were written originally for the Commodore/Apple version of *CAW* and were translated to the IBM format. The *Construction Kit* has been tweaked and new features added to it. Finally, the CD-ROM is packed with more than 50 megs of graphics and virtually every airplane and ship used in WWII, including American, Russian, German, Italian and French air forces and/or navies. From Norwegian tankers to Soviet subs and Stukas to Vals, they are all here.

The game installs easily in about 19 megs of disk space. It cannot be played off the CD-ROM. If that seems like a lot, remember that 1) we have more than eight megs of scenarios alone, and the construction kit, and 2) *Steel Panthers* takes 30 megs to run well, and you still need the CD-ROM! The other hardware requirements for *CCAW* are quite modest. A 386 machine, VGA, Soundblaster and mouse will put you in business, though a 486 is recommended. To see what has been changed since Commodore days, all one must do is load *CCAW*. The haunting Oriental music heralds a beautiful 256-color splash screen, then goes to the scenario choice screen with a music change. The game manual directs loading a scenario involving carrier operations near Trincomalee (near modern-day Sri Lanka). It gives sixteen pages as a tutorial on Trincomalee then turns the player loose to finish the game. The next thirty-eight pages cover each menu in the game and what they mean. The manual is well-organized and very readable, but it does not include an index or glossary to help beginning players.

But there's more. The manual is 224 pages long. In other words, the rest of the manual is devoted to a massive tutorial

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TACOPS was designed by I. L. Holdridge, a retired U.S. Marine Corps officer. It is the most detailed and

realistic simulation of contemporary and near-future tactical combined arms operations available today for the personal computer. You position your units with movement and disposition orders, set weapon engagement ranges, designate priority targets, and allocate air and artillery support. You are in command in **TACOPS**. If you think you can meet the challenge, **TACOPS** will provide you with hours of non-stop action and excitement.

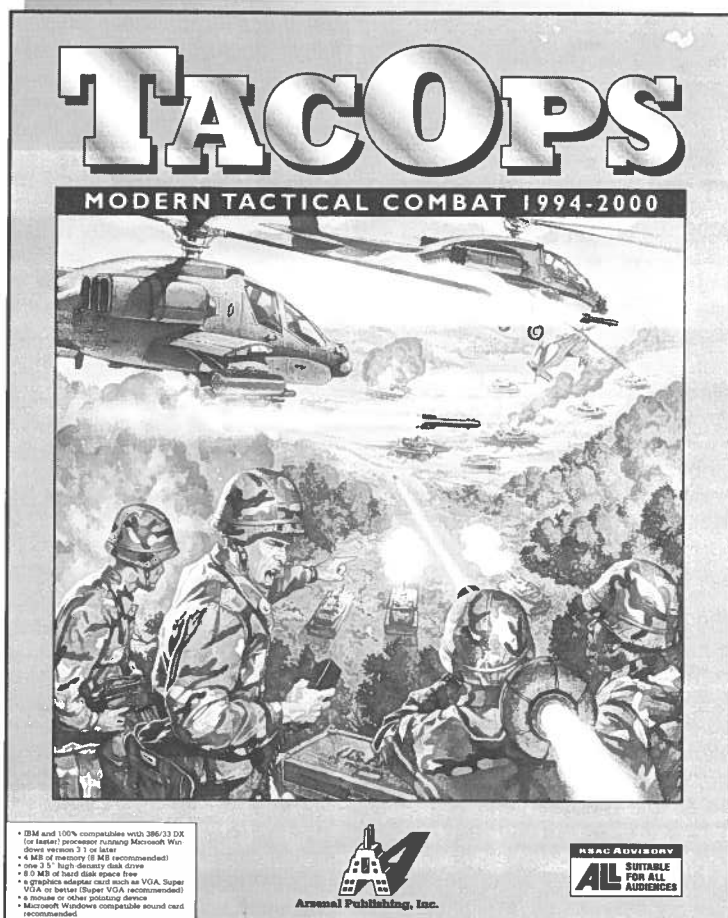
★★★★ 1994 Strategy/Wargame of the Year.

- Tremendous, detailed database
- Exceptional replay value—multiple variants per scenario
- All the options: modem, network, PBEmail
- Multiple AI opening moves per scenario
- Excellent, detailed documentation
- Fast, even on older machines

Inside Mac Games

★★★★ "An extremely detailed simulation of modern tactical warfare, going so far as to track each round of ammunition fired. Modern military buffs will be in hardware heaven."

Computer Gaming World



Runner-Up for Best 1994 Wargame. *TACOPS* is simply an outstanding piece of work, it's a polished product, and the company's attention to detail and perfection is evident throughout the game.

Strategy Plus

★★★★ "...It's good—real good... *TACOPS* is a serious wargame for dedicated players, and by foregoing some of the advanced options, it can be a heck of a lot of fun for just about every one."

Wargamers Monthly

★★★★ "*TACOPS* provides the best regimental tactical combat simulation around, and the support is outstanding."

ComputerUser

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For further information, contact Arsenal Publishing at (703) 742-3801 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. eastern standard time. Information is also available by e-mail from ArsenalPub (America Online), 74774,675 (CompuServe), a.publishing (GEnie), or arsenalpub@aol.com and arsenal.publishing@ase.com (Internet).

TacOps is available for Windows and Macintosh for \$44.95 plus \$5.00 shipping & handling (international shipping & handling \$15). To order, phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 1-800-247-1877. Visa, MasterCard, and Discover accepted. VA residents add 4.5% sales tax. Mail orders should be sent to: Arsenal Publishing, Inc., 44901 Falcon Place, Suite 108, Sterling, VA 20166-9531.

and description of items in the *Construction Kit*. It is not an easy task to develop even a small scenario. Again, the manual does an excellent job of leading the reader through the various facets of the kit, but there is still much work here. One special area where the revised construction set really shines is in Class Data Libraries. These libraries are built into the construction kit and include all the ships and planes used in games. Graphics and capabilities in game terms can be called up easily to plug into a scenario. If a new type is desired, it is a simple matter to add to the appropriate class library. The bad news is that the manual does not include a listing of the ship and plane statistics. A construction kit menu option is available to create a text file for printing, but be sure to have plenty of paper, since it is more than 200 pages long.

The Complete Carriers at War Scenarios

From *Carriers at War*

Pearl Harbor	Santa Cruz
Coral Sea	Eastern Solomons
Midway	Philippine Sea

From *Carriers at War 2*

Plan Orange	Port Darwin
Task Force Z	Leyte Gulf
Java Sea	Okinawa
Trincomalee	Operation Olympic

From *Carriers at War Construction Kit*

Wake Island	Tarawa
Guadalcanal	

From *RUN 5* magazine

Operation Ironclad	North Cape
Convoy P.Q. 17	Norway
Operation Pedestal	Action off Calabria
Invasion Hawaii	Cape Sparativotto
Arctic Convoy	Cape Matapan
Atlantic	Rainbow 5
Rabaul	Convoy Raiders
Coral Sea 1946	Midway 1947

The construction kit works much like any of SSG's other construction kits, except that a single scenario and all variants use the same basic data base. This simplifies construction of variants and makes way for the so-called War Room cards that are the meat of CCAW's artificial intelligence.

The War Room concept is innovative. The manual describes CCAW as SSG's first attempt to implement a "creation driven artificial intelligence structure" into a commercial program. What it boils down to is that the War Room concept consists of a series of circumstances and links actions or reactions to govern the behavior of an affected unit. The practice of using computerized war cards is much like card wargames such as *Magic*, *The Gathering* and *Star Trek Customizable Card Game*. However, here the computer does the card shuffling and threading based on the actions created for the scenario. The great part of the War Room concept is that it allows the computer's response to a set of circumstances to be truly random, but with follow through, unless circumstances again change and another random strategy is required.

Like everything else in CCAW, graphics creation is fairly involved. If you do not wish to use the included ships and planes, building your own is possible. The CD-ROM really shines here, since it includes a huge variety of basic ship designs, keels and other spare parts. Another manual tutorial describes how to use a program like *Deluxe Paint 2* to develop your own graphics, but Ian Trout's article in issue 19 of *RUN 5* is the definitive source of information. Unfortunately, it is not included with the game. Still, with a little artistic ability and the information in the manual, computer shipwrights should be in good shape.

A difference between CCAW and its predecessor is that design ranges are not nearly as limited. Creating sea battle scenarios that could take place in post World War II times should be possible. The biggest problem will be the creation of new plane and ship graphics.

In summary, CCAW is a great game system and a great value. Both incarnations of the game and construction kit have enjoyed healthy ratings in *WM* in the past. The CD-ROM combination offers outstanding value and the additional scenarios and enhancements make it a good addition to a wargame library, especially if one or more of the original packages are missing. □

WM

THE COMPLETE CARRIERS AT WAR

SYSTEM: IBM 386+; 2 MB EMS; hard drive w/ 19 MB free; DOS 5.0+; VGA; sound card (Soundblaster compat.); mouse; CD-ROM drive. 486 Recommended.

PUBLISHER: Strategic Studies Group, P.O. Box 30085, Pensacola, FL 32503-1085. (904) 469-8880.

RETAIL PRICE: \$49.95

WM RATING: ★★ ★^{1/2}

Quiet Time with Bill **BOOK REVIEWS**

Space, Time and Chaos: Combat Fundamentals

Everyone can learn the little tricks necessary to defeat the computer AI in their favorite wargames. Defeating the computer, however, is usually a petty triumph. Most of us judge the quality of a game by the degree to which it models reality when played against a human opponent. In order to succeed against live competition in a high quality game, some knowledge of the art of war is required. Is it more important to seize the high ground, or to concentrate, or to strike first? The never ending search for insight continues this month with three small books analyzing different aspects of the phenomenon of combat.

"Terrain and Tactics" by Patrick O'Sullivan (Greenwood Press 1991, ISBN 0-313-27923-3) focuses on the geographical aspects of combat. O'Sullivan has studied a

continued on page 14

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End Game

by David Erickson

Science fiction games have usually tended toward the simple, at least in their wargaming aspects. But most of the sci-fi fans I know are anything but simple, lukewarm enthusiasts. Their penchant for detail can exceed even that of the most hard core historical wargamer. Any of you who know a *Star Trek* fan can attest to that.

That's why I think sci-fi gamers - sci-fi wargamers in particular - are going to like *Circa. 7000, Armies of Armageddon*. Created by Michael Cooney of heretofore unknown Boku Strategy Games, *Circa. 7000 (C7)* sets forth an unnamed 71st century world of constant, unending warfare. Whereas most science fiction games aspire to create exotic future environments, *C7* concerns itself solely with tactical combat. That is, the conduct of battle here is no mere side-show, it is the *whole* show.

If you've ever played a computerized battle game before, then you can play *C7*. The goal of most scenarios is to destroy the enemy army with your own, either as an end in itself or as a means of occupying your objective. In the prepackaged scenarios, forces begin the game already deployed on the map. You move your units during the Movement Phase, you target enemy units during the Target Phase, and you fire your weapons during the Fire Phase. Still with me? Gameplay couldn't be any more straightforward. The game is simple, but not simplistic. In many ways, *C7* is quite innovative.

TACTICAL IN THE EXTREME

C7 is an extremely tactical game. Infantry units occupy a single "square" on the map while some of the larger vehicles occupy more than one square. The scale is never stated, but since there is no stacking (and, unfortunately, no move-through, either), one square on the map equals an area that a single guy can fill completely, either physically or as a matter of 71st-century doctrine. The time scale can't be any more than a minute or two per turn.

This implied scale may be a cause for concern among purists who would like the game to be the sci-fi equivalent to *Squad Leader*. A typical long-ranged vehicular weapon might have a range of 30 squares, while short-ranged weapons will fire 12, not the kind of performance one would expect of the distant future. But Mr. Cooney didn't set out to create "*Steel Panthers on Acid*", even though it might be a better game if he had. In this regard, *C7* lands squarely in playability's court even as it presents a healthy dose of "realism" and detail. Given the infantry movement rates of 4 to 5 squares per turn, a 12-hex weapons range added to other supporting weapons makes for a sound tactical premise..

Where *C7* falls short in terms of "soft" factors, such as morale, leadership and a myriad of other effects that might have been portrayed on such personal battlefields, it more than compensates in its presentation of units, both human and machine, and the weapons they carry.

At its most basic level, *C7* allows for two types of units, vehicles and non-vehicles. The primary distinction between the two types is in how the units move. Non-vehicles are simply given a number of movement points which they may use each turn in traditional fashion. Vehicles are given a Top Speed, an Acceleration Rate, and a Turn Rate.

As an example of how this works, let's say a vehicle has a Top Speed of 20. It starts the game with a speed of 0. Using the keyboard, the player inputs the vehicle's Acceleration for the turn. If the vehicle has an Acceleration Rate of 10, the maximum Acceleration the player may call for is 10 greater than the current speed (a vehicle can decelerate at twice the Acceleration Rate). At maximum Acceleration, it will take 2 turns for this vehicle to reach top speed and it can come to a complete stop from its Top Speed. Like tactical air and naval games, a vehicle must use all of its movement points each turn. The Turn Rate calculates how many movement points must be spent in forward movement before a 45-degree turn can be executed. The current speed is divided by the Turn Rate to arrive at this number. A vehicle with a Turn Rate of 8 traveling at a speed of 16 must move 2 spaces forward between each turn. Additionally, vehicles that start a turn stationary can move backward.

The handling of vehicles takes some practice, especially when they start a game bunched up or in close terrain. Collisions are not uncommon, so please drive carefully.

RAM SPEED

Each of these two basic types of units can further be designated Rammers, Hoverers, Transports and Boats.

All vehicles cause damage when they run into things, but a vehicle that is also a Rammer causes double damage to the ram-ee. This can be a vehicle's primary offensive weapon.

Hoverers halve all terrain movement penalties and they don't leave "tracks" as they move.

Transports can begin a game with non-vehicle units aboard. It can also load and unload units during play.

Boats can only move in water.

***"It's a shame that combat does not go
as far as it should, because other
game details are impressive."***

Since *C7* is primarily a game construction kit, the included scenarios offer many examples of how these definitions can be put to good creative use. One of the best of the prepackaged scenarios is a naval battle wherein all the ships are designated "vehicles". The large, powerful ships have been given lousy turn rates. Another scenario simulates a space battle which has large Transport vessels filled with small, highly mobile fighters. Since none of these designations affects the performance of a unit's other capabilities, we have here a nice mix-and-match construction system limited only by your creative genius.

This mix-and-match system carries over into a unit's weapons outfit. Weapons are defined separately from the units that carry them. Probably the most innovative aspect of *C7* is that each weapon is given a placement on the unit and a firing arc. An infantry unit, for example, might carry some kind of laser rifle with a 180-degree forward firing arc. That means it has to face whatever it's firing at. A larger unit might have a cannon placed in the middle with a 360-degree firing arc and other weapons, say, in the front right and left of the vehicle, with more restricted fields of fire.

One of the surprising things about *C7* is that it doesn't come with a sample WWII-era scenario since all the elements are here to include one. The U.S. Grant tank comes to mind in particular with its small gun in the turret and the 75mm cannon fixed forward in one side of the hull. There are also

flamethrowers, smoke grenades, artillery weapons and, using the customizer, the ability to create just about any weapon you can imagine. (Including a weapons definition that has each firing of the gun fire 2-4 shots; imagine this in conjunction with an artillery weapon that explodes over several squares.) Later "reality" scenarios can also be easily created. I think a Hoverer unit would make a fine helicopter for instance, albeit with some unrealistic limitations.

The actual firing of the weapons and the damage they inflict is a mixed bag of innovation and disappointment. On the innovation side, all weapons except artillery types fire in a sort of spray. That is, they will hit anything, including terrain, that gets in the way of a shot. Consequently, when firing multiple shot weapons (like machine guns) at a group of soldiers it is best not to target the first one in your line of sight. Rather, you should aim in the midst of them, letting the fire deviation hit multiple targets instead of overkilling the first. To counter this, you should always strive to keep your infantry spread out as far as possible, not only to avoid repeating laser fire, but to lessen the impact of high explosive weapons which affect more than one square. You can also create "infantry screens" to protect your more valuable weapons. The enemy can't pick off your valuable units in a sniper-like fashion.

What disappoints is the lack of the aforementioned soft factors. Units, other than vehicles, are only damaged, undamaged and dead. Damage has no effect on a unit's capabilities. Your soldiers are just as willing to sacrifice themselves to a lost cause as they are to reap the spoils of victory. A unit with 1 point of damage remaining out of 8 suffers not at all and will seek to defend itself only in accordance with your desire to protect it. Overall, the game could use a dose of intermediate damage effects and psychological factors. This would not only fit in well with the game, but would complement the way in which vehicle damage is assessed, making greater sense of the big picture. (Vehicles for instance can lose steering. No more right turns for you!)

Ammo types could also be included in the game without too much strain. If units were defined as either "hard" or "soft", weapons could then be defined as affecting hard or soft targets only - or both for that matter.

LEAVES OF GRASS

It's really a shame that combat does not go as far as it should because other game details are impressive. Terrain is one of them.

Besides the usual movement modifiers for moving through a piece of terrain, every terrain type can also take a certain number of hits, just like units. Once enough damage has been taken, that terrain is destroyed and it will change to a different type. For instance, walls change to rubble and bridges change to whatever terrain type they span. You can get yourself into some trouble, for example, by using high explosive weapons on a bridge you need to cross. You might take out the enemy, but once a bridge is gone, it's gone. Just hope your objective isn't on the other side.

Terrain also diminishes visibility by an amount set in the Customizer. When a line of sight is obstructed by 100%, a force can see no further. A wall of a building will diminish a line of sight by 100%, but a wheat field might obstruct vision by only 25%; that is, you can see 4 squares into the wheat field. This highlights the importance of smoke grenades carried by some infantry units. Each square of smoke blocks visibility by 50%. An infantry attack is not going to go very far without it.

Explosive weapons also cause smoke. Wind strength and direction (as set during scenario creation) causes smoke and mist to get blown around and determines how long it remains on the battlefield.

Given the destruction of terrain, the fact that some forces leave "tracks" as they move and the creation of smoke, the

end of a game will leave you with a battlefield that looks like - well, one that looks like a battle has been fought there.

Dangerous Terrain also factors into the game. Several of the prepackaged scenarios feature rivers of lava. These are always dangerous and affect all units entering them all the time. Additionally, Dangerous Terrain can be used to create land mines that blow only once when entered. You can also specify the size of the unit that must enter the square in order to activate the mine. Since, using the Customizer, you can create the terrain picture yourself, you can make your minefields visible or invisible by using the same picture for a mine and the terrain it is planted in. If the explosion destroys the terrain, you can have it change to craters or something.

D'YER MAKER

If C7 were just a battle game with a few scenarios and even a standard scenario generator, it would still be of more than moderate interest. But when you factor in what is easily the best scenario editor I've ever seen, you have a product that demands to be played with.

Let me say first of all that WM plans to cover C7's scenario editor in a separate article sometime down the road. So for now it will suffice to merely summarize some of its features.

Much of what the editor allows you to do you can surmise from what I've already written. In addition to creating terrain, forces and armies with a very flexible set of stats, you can draw their pictures using a simple icon editor of 256 colors. You can also customize sounds and attribute set animations to the firing of weapons. Do you want weapon A to show up as a fireball or a stream of flames?

All of the scenario creation utilities are easy to use and to understand. However, many of us will have problems with the icon editor due to our lack of artistic abilities. My own simply do not warrant 256-color SVGA. This is where I think the door is open for Boku with its resident artist Erik Battle to create (at least) icon sets for use in the editor. A beautiful set of futuristic vehicles and spaceships (and seafaring ships and cars even) as well as weapons are included with the game. But I'd like more, and I think most devotees of the game system would welcome them too.

Even if you never create a thing, you can always gather up the pre-existing forces, form them into armies and deploy them on pre-made maps and you're ready for action.

I CAN'T HEEEAR YOU

Reportedly 10% of C7 players have trouble with the sound. That is, for us, there isn't any. This problem will be fixed by Boku in the game's next incarnation. I'm not a big sound enthusiast anyway so the lack of it doesn't detract from my enjoyment of the game - although I'll admit watching *silent* animated explosions is not as much fun as it might be.

Despite the lack of sound and disappointing combat omissions, C7 remains an enjoyable game. The AI is no tactical genius. It tends to mill about aimlessly forgetting this turn what it was trying to accomplish last, and in the larger scenarios - at least when there are still lots of units on the map - it can take up to 5 minutes to process its turn (the average being about 1 minute). (I can't help but mention too that during the AI processing, the player is entertained by words of wisdom from *The Harper Book of Quotations*. Here's a beauty from Ronald Wright: "Societies that do not eat people are fascinated by those that do." Boy, you said it, Ron! Thanks for sharing.)

Still, when you factor in the scenario editor and the play-by-e-mail features *Circa. 7000* will go a long way toward satisfying your itch for a little alternative combat. □

WM**CIRCA. 7000
ARMIES OF ARMAGEDDON**

DESIGNER: Michael Cooney
PROGRAM: Michael Cooney
SYSTEM: IBM 486/33 minimum; 3.2 MB
Ext. Mem., 600K free conventional;
hard drive w/ 6 MB free; DOS; SVGA;
sound card optional; mouse.
PUBLISHER: Boku Strategy Games,
P.O. Box 2181, El Segundo, CA 90245.
(310) 376-9368 or (800) 535-7068.
PRICE: \$35
WM RATING: ★★ ★^{1/2}

**Fast Attack
REVIEW**

Denizens of the Deep

by Doug Todd

They prowl a place where none of us will ever see, let alone visit. There is no light and if you were to somehow leave the safety of the three inch thick steel hull that surrounds you the pressure would ruin your day. This is the world where the Los Angeles Class Attack Submarine (SSN) thrives. Sierra's latest foray into combat simulations pits the Los Angeles against various antagonists that she would face in the real world.

The evolution of the attack submarine from the end of WWII to the present could be more aptly described as a revolution. *Fast Attack* attempts to show some of the derivatives of that revolution. The reason most people have not perceived this shift towards the dominance of the SSN over the last thirty years is that the changes have been subtle and subs tend to avoid the public eye when they perform. This has a great deal to do with the silent service's tendency to keep a low profile combined with the tendency of governments who own them not to advertise their successful use, but that will probably change in the future as more countries discover the vastly increased power and flexibility of this type of weapons platform.

Shark's Teeth

The Los Angeles Class SSN weighs as much as a light cruiser did in WWII. She carries four torpedo tubes and is equipped with the Mark 48 wire-guided homing torpedo. This weapon trails out a cable which can allow the operator to steer the torpedo giving it the capability of chasing its targets as they try to escape. It packs a 650-pound warhead and is quite

capable of acquiring a target on its own after the cable has run out.

She carries two other types of missiles which are equally as devastating: the Harpoon, which is used to attack surface targets at ranges of about 80 to 90 miles. (Actually, the latest boats carry the UGM-84D models which reportedly have a range of about 150 nautical miles.) The second stinger that she is fitted with is the direct descendent of the two most devastating conventional weapons developed in WWII: the V-1 buzz bomb and the Kamikaze.

She is fitted with twelve vertical launch tubes which allows her to deliver Tomahawk cruise missiles to pin-point targets (ships, airstrips, buildings, oil rigs, grandma's outhouse if you wanted, since the targeting system is supposed to be that accurate). The reason the Tomahawks are so favored by policy makers is simple: they are very accurate (as described), they hit hard (carrying various warheads weighing in at 1000 lbs.) and best of all they don't have a pilot who could be captured or killed if a carrier plane was used for the same mission. A definite improvement over the Kamikaze. These weapons are ideal for attacking single targets, such as a single large ship at long range or a specific building or site like a radar station or an aircraft hangar. But they can attack area targets, such as an entire airfield or naval station.

Turning the Loop

Most simulations attempt to reflect reality as much as possible and still be playable (at least the good ones do). Combat, like most things in life, is a sequence or series of events which, at various junctures, requires that decisions be made. These can be broken down into three parts: a detection phase, during which various sources of information concerning the enemy is gathered and processed. The second phase is the assessment and planning phase in which, as Sun Tzu said, you decide where to hit the other guy while making sure he can't hit you back. Finally, the execution phase where you find out that the enemy doesn't always do what you want, so you learn to improvise.

To master these phases in *Fast Attack*, the simulation has laid out an accurate rendition of the various critical stations that would be used in combat on a Los Angeles Attack Submarine.

Battle Stations

The following stations and their functions are critical to understanding the sequence of events that must take place for a success in battle to occur.

Radio Console: This is where you get your orders and review the scenario objectives during the game. Very helpful if you're getting senile like me. More importantly, you can get satellite updates for you Area of Operations map which will give you a general, if dated, idea of enemy forces and past locations.

Sonar: The eyes... er, ears of the ship. The starting point for all attacks.

Helm: Driving the 6900-ton sub up to 35 knots and 950 feet depth.

Launch Console: Controls what goes into the sub's four torpedo tubes and the status of the weapons located therein.

Vertical Launch System: Console for controlling the status, arming, targeting and firing of the 12 Tomahawks.

Fire Control: BSY-1 fire control console, appropriately nicknamed "Busy One" on the boats. This is where you will use the passive and active sonar data to obtain firing solutions and send that data to the appropriate weapons. Learning to use this area is going to take a little while, but it's a must.

Area of Operations: A map of the surrounding area

including any information on ships in the area. If you've ever seen a Harpoon game map, you'll know what to do. Fairly straightforward.

Plot: Older method of determining firing solution using rulers, pencils and trigonometry. When hunting other subs, learning to use this station becomes a lot more important.

WLR-9: We Lost Run away. This station will be used when you've blown it and the other guys are shooting at you while you're firing decoys and desperately taking evasive action. (Yes, I know it well.)

Control Room: All the other stations can be controlled from this area. More importantly, this is where the periscope/esm mount is located. Still a useful instrument for quickly obtaining accurate targeting data.

Warbook: Sonar tracks are not immediately identified. Once a track is obtained it must be classified and when you know what it is you're listening to you come here to get its specifications.

Finally, there is a message flash screen which displays various reports to you during the scenario which you would want to know about, such as enemy torpedo bearing closing, things like that.

The trick, of course, is using these stations effectively and in the proper order, before the bad guys get the drop on you.

Battle Drill

An example should suffice to get a feel for the way the simulation works. You pick a scenario and start near your potential targets. First, go to helm and slow your speed to about 5 knots. Slow speeds allow you to hear the enemy while they have a hard time detecting you. Next, go to sonar and deploy the TB-23 towed array sonar system. This 960-foot cable will allow you to hear the enemy captain snore. It will take a while for the TB-23 to be deployed so during that time it is probably a good idea to check with the radio to see if there is a change in order, maybe a satellite update or just review your orders. At this point, while you're still having your coffee, go to the launch console and start loading your tubes. You're probably going to have a good idea of what you are up against so that you can make a pretty good guess as to which weapons you're going to use. Load, flood and ready the weapons. It might be jumping the gun a bit but it saves time later and is less noisy now before you get within arm's length of somebody who might hear you flood those tubes.

Prep phase completed. Now for detection. Sonar will probably have several contacts so you must classify each of them to find out which one is the potential victim. Once you find a target go to Fire Control and start to work on a firing solution by varying the range, course and speed data collected from the passive or active sonars, or the periscope on your target of choice to get an initial estimate for a firing solution. Send it to the attack computer then go to the Area of Operations map. It's time to decide if you have a good set up or are you going to want to move. This is just one of several decisions you will have to make.

After refining the solution and getting a pretty accurate fix, send it to the weapon that you've selected for the target and get ready to launch. This sounds so easy but a lot can go wrong and it takes practice to take on another submarine and/or several surface warships who are hunting for you at the same time.

By this time you have passed from the planning phase and are rapidly moving into the execution setup. You might even be planning to attack several targets at once. This is where the sequence comes into play again. It may seem like you have a lot of time to do this but the computer is not just twiddling its thumbs. If you've done everything correctly and no one has changed course or stumbled onto you and you're lucky... Bang! you get to see those great digitized animated sequences of your launched weapons hitting their intended targets. If not, you are probably in WLR-9 trying to get your aft section out of there.

The trick is getting the right sequence down, having a pretty good knowledge of how to use each control station and knowing when to cut to the chase. There is a tendency to "polish the cannonball," which means that you are not going to be able to get the perfect set up and you have to go with the best solution at the best time.

Fittings

This game is not going to be for everyone. There is a good deal of skill that has to be acquired on the handling of some of the stations. You have to be able to put in quite a bit of time doing procedures that sort of remind me of doing homework in high school, then act quickly and run. It will probably do well among hard core computer simulationists like myself, but I doubt that it would fit into someone's arcade library. It just does not fit in that field.

It seems to be a fairly accurate simulation of what a submarine commander would have his people do during an exercise, greatly simplified of course. And as a game, it is enjoyable, but it falls on the side of having fun playing yourself in chess. It's solitaire and makes no provision for playing against someone else, which is a design decision that's hard to quibble with.

Damage Control

Still, there are some areas that could use improvement. From the simulation standpoint, the designers didn't include a Mark 48 ADCAP (Advanced Capabilities) Torpedo, but they have been available for a few years at least. This weapon has a greater speed (60+ knots) and the attack computer is able not only to defeat enemy counter measures, but the torpedo itself can run in a slow stealth mode and can be used as a remote sensor system until it is set to attack. I am not sure why this weapon was left out since it would have had a significant effect on tactics.

Also, as I mentioned above, they don't use the most up-to-date Harpoon model (the "D") which has enhanced capabilities and a much longer range.

These are relatively minor points that only those who are really into that sort of thing would ever notice. (It's good to know where I fit in here.)

Replayability could be a problem. It appears that if you replay a scenario, the startup is always the same. No provision for randomness at all. There are a large number of scenarios and numerous battle sets which allow the player to fight almost anywhere a sub could be used, so the chance that you would even go back to a scenario is remote. I guess I'm getting spoiled with games like *TacOps* which allows for a different personality for the computer commander selected randomly each time you play, combined with different setup locations.

Speaking of which, the AI of the enemy is adequate and will give you a hard time, but it seems to play according to the same rules every time and while tough, humans are like water, if there's a hole in the bucket, we'll find it. More design teams need to work on neural nets and randomly generated strategies, tactics and personalities.

On the game level there are some minor points. It would be nice to be able to find individual traces on the "waterfall" passive sonar screen. It's a pain to constantly click around until you finally lock on to that trace you knew was mixed in with four other contacts.

Also, the Tomahawk launch control system will confuse some people at first (me, anyway). It's the one place where you have to use the keyboard to engage each missile for a target.

The graphics, especially the animated film clips are pretty good and I prefer them over the standard film cuts that you see again and again. Although it would have been nice to have been able to control them a little more (in particular, by

Circa 7000

Armies of Armageddon

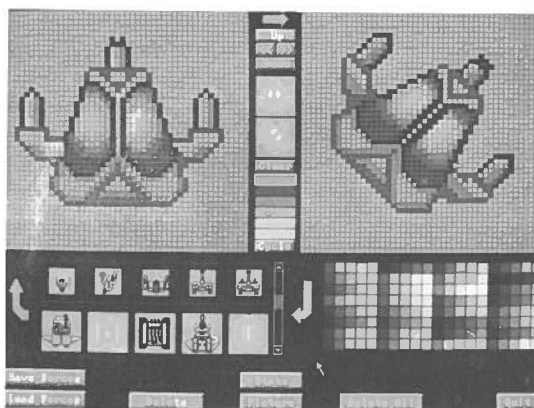
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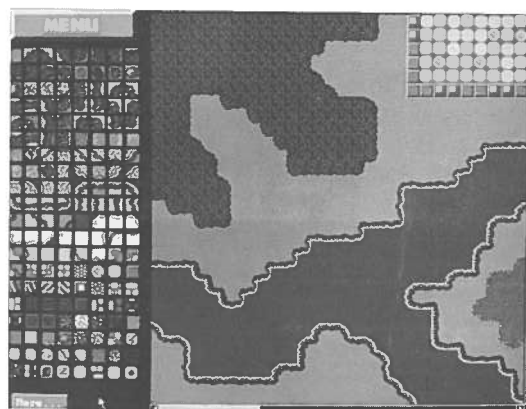
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stopping the torpedo loading scene and keeping the weapon strike scenes), but otherwise they are state of the art. One thing that is interesting is the fact that if you fire at a particular class of frigate you see the weapon strike that particular class. A nice touch.

Overall

I enjoyed the game and had fun playing it despite some of its shortcomings. The engine itself seems to be pretty authentic and it would do well for anyone interested in this little-known type of warfare to pick up a copy and see what a true capital ship of the navy is capable of doing (without anyone seeing you do it). □

WM **FAST ATTACK**

SYSTEM: IBM 486+; 8 MB RAM; 2x CD-ROM; SVGA; mouse. Optimum: 16 MB RAM; 4x CD-ROM; Sound Card. (Game reviewed in this setting in DOS mode, but will support Win95.)
PUBLISHER: Sierra, P.O. Box 85006, Bellevue, WA 98015-8506.
PRICE: \$69.95
WM RATING: ★★★^{1/2}

War in the East: Crimea REVIEW

The Red and the Grey

by Ernest Claridge

If I meet the deadline imposed on me by the slavemaster (aka David Erickson) this will be the third month in a row that one of Schwerpunkt's simulations has been reviewed by this publication. That makes it very hard for reviewer to find anything meaningfully new to say about this excellent series of games. The latest incarnation covers the three battles that occurred in the *Crimea* during the Second World War. Scenario One (Sept 41 to April 42), the default, covers the German invasion in 1941 and the Russian counteroffensive in 1942. Scenario Two (May 42 to July 42) covers the German spring offensive and the capture of Sevastopol. The last one (April -May 44) covers the recapture of the area by Russian forces. In most instances these are primarily infantry battles which is not surprising given the terrain in question. For the purposes of this review I played the first scenario in detail as German and then the third as Russian.

In David's opening comments of his article on *Leningrad* he refers to this game being comfortable for a boardgamer, and this very point is brought out in the excellent, albeit

sparse, designer's notes that accompany the game. No criticism is implied here because I found my understanding, and enjoyment, much improved when I took the time to study what Ron Dockal was trying to achieve with *Crimea* and the *War in the East* series. Also of great use is a twelve page document that lists and explains all status and error messages that you will encounter during play. It is an invaluable tool and a must-read for any new player. This pamphlet should be emulated by any company truly interested in assisting their prospective customers.

Up front I will mention my only meaningful criticism which may apply to some of you. This game is very unforgiving if, like me, you have a VGA monitor with a 1 meg video card. It just would not display on my computer and was adequate, at best, on my son's. I found it difficult, for example, to determine just what type of unit I was accessing. To be fair the documentation stipulates SVGA monitor required, but then so does the *World at War* series and I can run those just fine. I mention this because if you want to buy this game - and I recommend you buy at least one of the series, if not all three - then you might want to factor in the price of a new monitor or video card if you are still struggling to get by on VGA. But let's not unduly dwell on the only potential flaw, especially as most of you probably have more modern equipment than I do. Suffice to say that what I saw on my son's PC was enough to get me looking for a better monitor. This game is that good!

In order not to repeat what has already been written in the previous two reviews I will briefly skim over the standard options and concentrate on what appears to be new. Obviously, not having played the other two games, I may have missed some major new development but I must admit my impression from reading *Leningrad* and *Kiev* is that the basic engine is unchanged, the AI is just barely adequate and this game is probably best played with a human opponent. Whereas *Kiev* had five options to consider *Crimea* has six, the additional one being "Advanced Combat" which allows the player to choose between combat types. ie Breakthrough, Capture or Hold Hex, Pursuit, Retreat or Movement. When I played the first scenario, I used Basic Combat so that I could concentrate on the game in total rather than be bogged down in nuances of gameplay. When I played the third scenario I did utilize this option and I must say it added a new, better, perspective. As is mentioned in the notes there are some scenarios where you simply cannot win, the German in 1944 comes to mind. The computer however will judge your performance in a hopeless cause and could still judge you the "winner" based on how you perform under pressure. I mention this because in such cases I would imagine it would be very hard to "win" without the use of Advanced Combat.

The key feature, to my mind, is Pursuit Combat which allows you to exploit a hole in the enemy lines and keep your opponent off balance. You also have the option of just capturing the hex which results in maximum damage to your opponent. As defender you have the option of Holding combat, which is somewhat like "hold at all costs" in the *World at War* series. This is designed to prevent a breakthrough by your opponent. This would obviously be used extensively by the German player in '44 and the Russian in '41. However, I was somewhat puzzled when I was expected to direct the retreating enemy units. Surely, unless I was very honest, I am going to make the enemy unit retreat in the most beneficial way to me. I would have thought that the computer should have handled this chore. I also would have preferred some indication of when I was in supply. Several times I found my breakthrough units were out of supply when I thought one could trace a direct supply route. But these are small points that doubtless one intuitively learns to do the more expert one becomes at playing the game.

The screen display and basic game play are good and should be very familiar to longtime boardgamers. In fact, in many ways this game reminds me of the old 8-bit games, of the type I used to play on my Atari. As I am a proponent that dollar for dollar those games represented much better value

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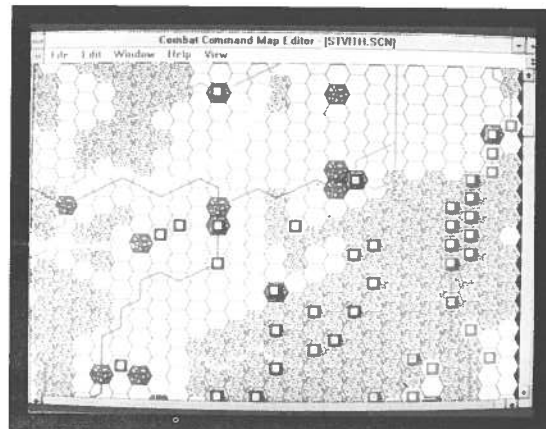
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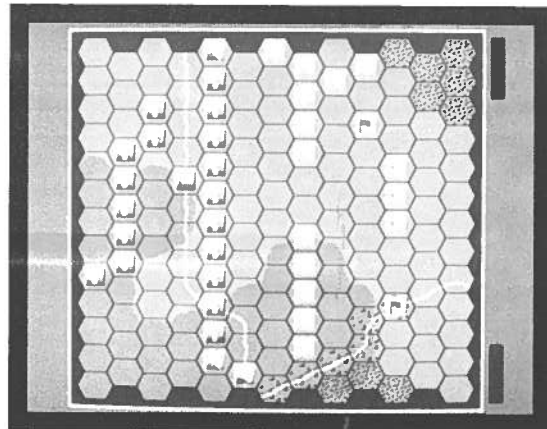
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than many of the more recent games I mean this as a compliment.


The command panel consists of numerous icons, all of which are fully explained in the manual and gameplay is remarkably smooth. I would not have chosen the mechanics for air power in quite the way Ron did wherein you have to judge the distance to the nearest friendly controlled city. I would rather this sort of thing be delegated to the computer. But, again, it's a minor burr that reflects more on my impatience with detail rather than a design flaw.

Before planning your attacks, carefully read the section of the manual relating to combat. Terrain and weather can have noticeable impacts on combat results. I like the way combat is split into two sections that allow mechanized units to have an additional turn. Good commonsense stuff that all too often is ignored or not suitably addressed in other games.

This game also introduces naval movement and you can land or withdraw units depending on the parameters laid down in the scenario. You are forced to land at a port city but only if it is not occupied by the enemy, I found the computer did not give me this option, at least in the games I played.

In summation, I don't want to bore you with a rerun of what has been already mentioned, especially in the Kiev review. I do not know how much this incarnation of the game engine has been tweaked based on customer feedback but I suspect quite a lot. When I was having problems with my VGA monitor I spoke to Ron and he was very helpful and appeared genuinely interested in helping me out. This is indicative of the behaviour shown by Scott Hamilton who published *Tigers on the Prowl* and of the Frank Hunter, the author of *From Sumter to Appomattox*. With designers like these three the future of our hobby looks bright. I have absolutely no qualms in recommending that you buy this game. At \$29.95 it's a steal.

Sometimes after a review I give the game to my kids or a friend but this one is a keeper. It's going to cost me \$300 for a new monitor but it's worth it. I am looking forward to the next release and playing those I've missed so far. I personally hope that Ron considers doing the Kursk battle in the near future which I believe would suit this system to a tee! □

**CRIMEA**

DESIGNER: Ron Dockal
SYSTEM: IBM 386+; 512K RAM;
SVGA in 800x600x256 mode; hard
drive; DOS 3.1+; mouse.
PUBLISHER: Schwerpunkt, 2483
Woodbury Street, Suite 150, Pearland,
TX 77584-4801. (713) 997-1209
PRICE: \$29.95
WM RATING: ★★★★★

Quiet Time continued from page 5

variety of "small" wars in the third world, from which he tries to draw some general lessons about the importance of terrain. There are a few interesting observations, including the relative concentration of warfare in the southern hemisphere since the end of World War II, but the most striking aspect of this book is the absence of much discussion of the impact of terrain on tactics. This is, perhaps, inevitable. Although the U.S. Army's FM 100-5 notes that "weather and terrain have more impact on battle than any other physical factor, including weapons, equipment or supplies," there are a limited number of pertinent maxims.

O'Sullivan does burst a few bubbles. He challenges the

prevailing myth of the desert as an optimal field for armored warfare, arguing that the fluidity of the North African campaigns in the Second World War was the result of "small armies tearing around an extensive theater," overcoming the natural inhospitality of the desert to men and machines that gives an advantage to the defensive. His conclusion is supported by the tendency of war in the desert, particularly in the Sinai, to resolve into a series of battles for road junctions. There is also an extensive analysis of urban combat that concludes that the advantage in this terrain lies with the attacker, a judgment that validates and is validated by my personal experience with urban battles in Steel Panthers.

There is much of interest in this little book (182 pages with bibliography and index), particularly in regard to guerrilla and counter-insurgency tactics, but little to assist the budding panzer general. It does, however, set the stage for a discussion of the other important variable in combat - time.

"Fighting by Minutes: Time and the Art of War," by Robert Leonhard (Praeger 1994, ISBN 0-275-94736-X) explores the difficulties inherent in Nathan Bedford Forrest's admonition to "get there first with the most". Leonhard will be familiar to many readers as one of the most articulate advocates of maneuver warfare and "mission orders". His thinking has clearly matured since "The Art of Maneuver" first appeared in 1991. It is the thesis of his more recent work that clever commanders "measure warfare not by miles gained or body counts, but rather by minutes".

An army does three things: move, strike and protect. The emphasis of one or more elements of this triad at the expense of another defines three styles of war. Positional theory emphasizes protection and movement, while striking is accomplished implicitly through a combination of the other two activities. Maneuver theory sacrifices protection to movement and striking, which are intended to protect implicitly. Interchangeability theory is based on the notion that firepower can be substituted for maneuver, sacrificing movement for protection and striking. Leonhard no longer advocates a doctrine of pure maneuver. Instead, he has discerned the need to distinguish two phases of combat, subjective/protective and objective/dislocation, and to develop the ability to determine when the time is right to shift from one to the other.

Leonhard explores a number of temporal aspects - duration, frequency, sequence and opportunity - shedding fresh light on old concepts in each discussion. In particular, he brings critical analysis to the maneuver theory he has advocated previously, pointing out a fatal flaw of "mission orders". It is of no use to tell a commander what to do without specifying how it is to be done if the commander is not given the right assets to accomplish the mission. Unfortunately, the range of many modern weapons greatly exceeds the operating range of most levels of command to whom mission orders are appropriate. If control of these weapons is held at a level appropriate to their range, they will not be available to the mission commander without contacting (and giving the opportunity to direct or interfere to) higher headquarters.

Leonhard's analysis of frequency, the need to interfere with the enemy's decision cycle, and surprise provide useful insights to support the choice in a specific case between being there first or being there with the most. His final chapter, "A Blow of the Eye", lends a temporal aspect to that most highly valued talent of the great commanders, coup d'oeil. This little book (186 pages with bibliography and index) will not guarantee wargaming success, but it will, at least, shed light on the reasons for your defeat.

"War, Chaos, and History", by Roger Beaumont (Praeger 1994, ISBN 0-275-94949-4) suggests the possibility that there is simply no light available. Beaumont was drawn to

complexity and chaos theory by his insight that the memoirs and recollections of the actual participants in acts of war rarely bore any resemblance to the neat battle maps and rational narratives of military historians. The result is an extremely difficult book that brings into question all of the carefully constructed formulae that drive our favorite wargames.

Early in this work (214 pages with bibliography and index), Beaumont develops his overriding metaphor: "Interest in nonlinearity, chaos, and complexity has intensified since the mid-1970s, when some primary nonlinear concepts emerged at the same time that increasing computer capacity allowed theorists to undertake the calculating of nonlinear phenomena that had previously been intractable. A salient construct among those was the result of research meteorologist Edward Lorenz's seeking to understand why major advances in computer modeling of weather systems had not increased the ability to predict climatic conditions, as many had expected." Observing weather systems' 'sensitive dependence on initial conditions,' he set forth his butterfly metaphor, to dramatize the effect, by suggesting that a weather system's ultimate development might be profoundly influenced in its delicate formative stage by so slight a force as the flutter of a butterfly's wings.

The remainder of the book challenges the foundations of military history and doctrine by viewing them through the lens of nonlinear theories. Beaumont's writing style throughout teeters on the razor's edge between complexity and chaos, making the book a remarkably hard read. The passage cited above is among the simpler grammatical constructions. Although his final chapter is titled "Considerations and Conclusions," conclusions are difficult to find. Indeed, his thesis suggests the possibility that they may be unreachable. Nevertheless, the considerations are considerable and while this book will not lend any particular assistance during your next engagement, it may offer theoretical consolation when your overwhelming assault falls to pieces. Perhaps the kingdom was lost for want of a nail after all.

All three of these books reinforce Clausewitz's observation that in war everything is simple, but even the simplest thing is extremely difficult. There are no pat formulae or sure answers, and even the best commander can be foiled by a butterfly's wing, but study will certainly improve the odds. □

LETTERS

Send your Letters to:

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Dear Wargamers
Monthly...



THE GUNS OF AUGUST

Dear Mr. Erickson and Mr. August,

Thank you for the kind words in your review entitled "A Computer Game Company for Wargamers", Volume 5 Number 3. We greatly appreciate the "pat on the back"

for Schwerpunkt's direction. We know it is not the same direction that the wargaming market seems to be taking. It is very gratifying to hear that wargamers such as yourselves appreciate where we are going.

More importantly, thank you for your constructive criticism of *Kiev*. Due to the relative timing between your review and the completion of *Crimea*, we were unable to incorporate your comments in *Crimea* completely. However, we did make the following improvements to *Crimea* based on your comments.

1. We have added a Designer's Notes Booklet. This contains the "War in the East Series Design Goals". In addition, it includes notes on the design challenges in creating *Crimea*. The booklet will be expanded in future games.

2. Also included in the Designer's Notes are a disclosure of the details of the Victory Conditions. As your review correctly pointed out, the scenarios are not play-balanced in the usual sense of the word. This was done on purpose to allow us to choose scenarios where each side does not have an equal capability to destroy the other and control the battlefield. We believe that command of a side in severe trouble can also be an interesting, historical and informative experience.

In our opinion, the victory conditions balance the scenario. The victory conditions set expected results with respect to controlling geographical objectives and causing enemy losses. The player's grade, and therefore who wins, is determined by how well these parameters compare to the expected results. We also believe as you, that "competitiveness, play balance and excitement level are the hallmarks of a good game". We believe the Victory Conditions are a way of obtaining this. Our error was in not clearly communicating this to the wargamer and the reviewer.

3. Also included in the Designer's Notes are a disclosure of the details of the Combat Results Table. We had intentionally not disclosed this information, believing that wargamers would want to concentrate on strategy and not game mechanics. However, we have found out by your review (and several customer comments that verified your review) that many wargamers want to see this. It is included in *Crimea*, and will be included in all future *War in the East* Series games.

4. *Kiev* OOB development did suffer at the hands of AI. Upon further analysis, the German losses in Scenario Two are lower than historical as you stated. In Scenario Three, we had intended to concentrate on the Kiev area, not the southeast part of the battlefield. We intentionally left off the Russian OOB in this area, but incorrectly did not leave off the German OOB in this area. In the retrofit, we will correct the OOB and add game mechanics that mask off this part of the battlefield so the Kiev area is emphasized, which was our original intention.

For *Crimea*, we believe we have accurately captured the OOB and strengths of the units.

It is Schwerpunkt's intentions to retrofit all improvements to the previous games when we feel we have it "right". We state this and other Schwerpunkt intentions in the first two sections of the *Crimea* Designer's Notes entitled "War in the East Series Design Goals". The difficult part is, of course, determining when we have it "right". *Wargamers Monthly* reviews are a critical part of that decision.

Ron Dockal
President, Schwerpunkt

INDIRECT PRAISE

Gentlemen,

This letter is prompted by the article in your March 1996 issue in which Christopher Schall reviewed SSI's *Allied General* (AG). In his review, Mr. Schall says that AG "works flawlessly on (his) PC". I'd like to ask what kind of mouse Mr. Schall is using.

I have been running the Windows 3.1 version of AG, and, when I boot the game, I'm greeted with an error message saying that "GROWSTUB has caused a General Protection Fault in Module Pointer DLL at (an address that is sometimes given as 001:0FB8 and sometimes as 0001:F64)". The game seems to boot normally once I close the error message, but then, at a point varying randomly from game to game, the program freezes, locking my computer.

I spoke with SSI who told me the problem was a recognized incompatibility between AF and the Version 9.01 Microsoft mouse.

The incompatibility problem existed, they said, in both the Windows 95 version of AG and the Windows 3.1 version (which I use). I should point out that, after talking with SSI, I replaced my Version 9.01 mouse driver with an earlier Version 9.0, to no avail.)

I wonder whether Mr. Schall is using an older or otherwise different mouse driver, or doing something else I'm not. I also wonder whether he or any of your staff or readers has encountered the problem I have, and, if so, found a solution.

While I'm writing, I'd like to thank Mr. Rohrer for his article on *Steel Panthers* in the same issue. He solved a problem for me that SSI could not by pointing out that German 150mm guns, though "artillery" are "incapable of indirect fire". I spoke with SSI about *Steel Panthers*, pointing out that I was unable to get on-map 150s to fire using the indirect fire menu. The Customer Rep told me I must be suffering from one of the "many bugs" that afflicted the initial version and directed me to Novastar for *Steel Panthers* upgrades.

Please forgive the length of this letter. Thanks for your attention and for an outstanding magazine.

J.C. Sahyan
Farmingdale, NY

Chris Schall writes:

My Quantex system came with a standard serial mouse by Microsoft model 2.0A. The mouse software that it came with is 9.01. I fully appreciate the frustrating nature of the gamer's question. I still have a game that I have not been able to play; and I've had it for months. This is *Stonekeep* by Interplay and I believe that my problem is sound card related. These days I almost always expect problems when I make a new purchase in software. This is most unfortunate and very frustrating. I was quite surprised at the ease of set-up and play of *Allied General* and so commented on it. I have heard of others having problems with *Allied General*. Apparently, I have been spared this trouble although I do not know why - as we both have the same mouse software version. I have not had any problems running AG with Windows 95. Sorry that I could not be of further assistance.

Kevin Rohrer writes:

The Customer Rep is incorrect. about the German guns. During the early years of WWII several countries to include Germany and France fielded short-barrelled, short-ranged howitzers called "infantry guns". These guns were meant to accompany infantry by providing them with close support, direct fire. SP models this doctrine by labelling such guns "Inf guns", the asterisk denoting their lack of indirect fire capability. As of V1.16, the game still prevents them from being used in the indirect bombardment role. Just don't get the German 150mm infantry gun confused with their 150mm cannon.

AIN'T DISAGREEIN'

You have a very good magazine that influences most of my computer gaming purchases. I've never disagreed with any of your assessments or game reviews. I've been wargaming for 30+ years and find that we agree on most everything. Keep up the good work.

Michael Mace
Rocklin, CA



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Jim Cobb: Bismarck@Delphi.com

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RANTINGS & WM READERS' POLL RATINGS

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2. BG: Gettysburg	4.25	27. Perfect Gen 2	3.54
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Wargamers Monthly is published monthly (12 times per year) by Wargamers Monthly, 12 Metric Road, Iowa City, IA 52240. 2nd Class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa.

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Wargamers Monthly, 12 Metric Road, Iowa City, IA 52240.